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ABSTRACT

The management of innovation in instruction in English as a second language can benefit from the experience and techniques of management in the world of commerce as well as from theories and procedures in education. A systematic approach to the management of innovation emphasizes the importance of clearly defined objectives, evaluation that provides useful information, and conditions for successful change. These conditions include providing organization members with a clear picture of their roles and of the nature of the innovation, adjusting organizational procedures and arrangements to accommodate the innovation, retraining organization members as needed to carry out the innovation, providing the necessary resources, and providing appropriate supports and rewards to maintain participants' willingness to make implementation efforts. (MSE)

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Managing Innovation

Ronald V White

Abstract

The management of innovation in ELT can benefit from the experience and techniques of management in the world of commerce as well as from theories and procedures derived from Education. A systematic approach to the management of innovation is proposed, in which the importance of establishing a clear understanding of aims is crucial, the incorporation of illuminative evaluation is highly desirable, and the provision of conditions for successful change is regarded as one of the responsibilities which management must assume.

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Managing Innovation

Ronald V White

Introduction

"There seems little doubt that failure to innovate, even in a mature industry, is a recipe for disaster," say Goldsmith and Clutterbuck (1984) in their best-selling analysis of British Industry, The Winning Streak . That ELT is an 'industry', let alone a mature one, may not appeal to teachers, who probably regard themselves as educationists and not as industrialists. Yet, ELT is a service industry, supplying people with a service — English language teaching — and a commodity — the English language. So, although we may not be used to thinking in management terms, the effective running of any ELT enterprise is subject to essentially the same considerations as apply in any other industry.

In this paper, I shall be drawing on ideas from good management practice as well as from education, and I shall discuss innovation, why it comes about, what it is and how it can be managed. In doing so, I shall be proposing procedures based on the Coverdale Organization's Systematic Approach to management. I shall also consider what the responsibilities of management are in providing the conditions for effective innovation to take place.

Innovation

Innovation is more than change, although all innovation involves change. Whereas all organizations necessarily change over time, innovation is planned and deliberate, it is intended to bring about improvement and it is fundamental in nature. Importantly, innovation is perceived as new by all involved with it. As Miles (1964) says, innovation is

> a deliberate, novel, specific change, which is thought to be more efficacious in accomplishing the goals of a system.

He might also have added that innovation can be a change in the goals themselves. In a school, innovation will involve changes in teachers' attitudes and practices, it will often involve an increase in teachers' work loads, and it will amost always involve time, cost and evaluation.

Innovations arise in response to a number of influences, some from outside the school, others from within. External influences include social change within the larger community, developments in the size and growth (or

contraction) of the educational establishment, economic development and changes in patterns of manpower demand. Influences from within the school include the presence of large numbers of unmotivated students, the felt need for change on the part of teachers (who may be bored with what they have been doing), and the presence of 'message bearers' who have arrived with new ideas.

The motivation for innovation can, of course, have an important influence on the dynamics of innovation. In general, innovations which are identified by members of and arise within an institution stand more chance of success than those which are imported or imposed.

Management

Management becomes crucial when we are concerned with implementing innovation since management is concerned with the definition of goals, the allocation of resources, the motivation of personnel and the directing of an enterprise towards agreed goals. Management can be thought of as processes and procedures on the one hand and as that section of an organization which is concerned with exercising the management function on the other. In the former aspect we deal with *managing*, while in the latter we are concerned with *managers*.

In the context of a school, managing is what we do when planning

new syllabuses, choosing new textbooks, making decisions about class organization, planning examinations, running staff meetings, budgeting for new equipment, and so on. Management is concerned with policy and the defining of guidelines within which the day to day administration of an institution takes place. Teachers tend to have many administrative functions, such as running a class library, organizing a self-access centre, ordering textbooks, arranging timetables, collating examination results, etc. The teacher herself may have had very little hand in formulating the policies which she has to administer.

Policy decisions which affect the running of the school over the medium to longer term will typically be made by staff whose roles are concerned less with pedagogic issues as such than with managing as I have defined it. The director of studies, head of department or course leader will usually be concerned with managing first and teaching second, even if, as one assumes, the management function is to serve the teaching one.

The Cultural Context

Let us now turn to the application of management as a process in to the implementation of innovation within a school. It is important to realize that no proposals for innovation occur in a vacuum. As Miles (1964:18) says,

> Innovations are always operant in relation to a given social system; they affect one or more parts of the system crucially, and are in a very real sense rejected, modified, accepted and maintained by existing forces in the immediate system.

In other words, a school has a culture, which

> covers such intangibles as its tone, its value system, the standards by which merit is judged, personal relationships, habits, unwritten rules of conduct and the practice of educational judgement. (Everard & Morris 1985:118)

It is important, therefore, that in managing innovation, the culture of the school should be taken into account. It is also important to approach the process of innovation in a reasonably systematic way so as to take account of the prevailing culture and to avoid conflict, promote understanding and develop commitment by all concerned.

Importance of Communication

A vital element in such a process is communication. All the research evidence on the managing of innovation emphasises that communication at

all stages of an innovatory process is vital to achieving successful outcomes. Audrey Nicholls (1983) says that

> ...it is of crucial importance that teachers working together to plan innovation should be prepared to discuss the meanings of ideas and principles underlying their innovations in order to establish, among other things, that they are at least talking about the same thing.

Roger Bowers (1983) makes the same point, but in relation to project management of the type common in centrally funded development. He says

> Not only does the project team ...need to communicate with the administrators and financial authorities upon whom the success of the project largely depends, as well as with those directly affected by the project (the teachers, trainers, etc.) In addition, a project team needs to communicate <u>within</u> itself — to clarify the different preoccupations and preconceptions and values which individual members hold...Too often a team is set to work without the time for this professional familiarization, the opportunity to

> identify varying interests and strengths and put them to work in the context of the programme. And failure to recognize these differences of standpoint can lead to dissention later.

So, then, reaching a mutual understanding is fundamental. But it is also important that all participants feel that they have contributed towards the formulation of the innovation, that they are part of it and that it is part of them. People who are not informed of new developments will tend to lack responsibility towards the innovation. Goldsmith and Clutterbuck (op cit.: 69) quote Jan Carlsson, chief executive of the Scandinavian airline SAS: 'Those who have no information can take no responsibility. Those who have information have no choice but to take responsibility.'

Being Systematic

Although, as Everard and Morris (op cit.: 183) point out, the management of change cannot be reduced to "something like the check list that an airline pilot runs through before take-off", it is important to follow a relatively systematic approach to innovation. Everard and and Morris propose six key stages which have to be carried out sequentially, although there may be some recycling in the later stages. The steps which I outline below follow a similar sequence, and are adapted from the Coverdale Organization's Systematic Approach (Coverdale 1985).

1. Defining Aims

Being systematic can begin by finding answers to a number of questions.

'What is the innovation?'

'What do we mean by the terms that we use?' (e.g. what do we mean by functional or communicative or task-based learning)?

'Why are we carrying out this innovation?'

'What is it for?'

'Who is it for?'

'Do we actually need it?'

The process of defining aims and of "laying things open", as Roger Bowers describes it, can be enormously time consuming, although the evidence suggests that such time is well spent, provided that everyone is co-operatively involved in the discussions. It is as well, on a purely practical level, to keep records of what is discussed and agreed and that these records (which should not be over long or nobody will read them) are circulated to all concerned (some of whom may well be absent from some of the discussions, and will, therefore need to be kept informed of what has been happening).

2. Defining End Results

Clarity about and agreement on the end results are fundamental. What, in short do we want to achieve? At this stage, the precise character of the

end results cannot be specified, but an agreement on the nature of the outcome is essential, since it is this specification which provides the goal to which all members of the organization will be working.

The specification will, of course, depend on the nature of the innovation. It could be a fully equipped and organized resource centre with materials catalogued and cross referenced with access achieved by means of a computerized key-word catalogue. Or it could be an A4 sheet specifying the main topics to be covered by a given class during the forthcoming semester. Or it could be a carefully graded sequence of learning tasks linked to a list of language functions and exponents to be covered by all students during a course of a specified level. Or it could be an agreement to experiment with a new technique as a way of exploring methodological changes appropriate to the changing needs of students.

As Everard and Morris (op cit.: 188) note,

> All who are affected by the change need a clear picture of what it will mean for them: what will they be doing differently, after the change has been implemented? They want to know specifically what it means <u>in practice</u> for them.

Furthermore, as they point out

> Clarity is not something which can be pre-packaged in some sort of blueprint; it is something that

grows through dialogue and questioning.

As we shall see later, achieving clarity and understanding is an important function of illuminative evaluation.

3. Gathering Information

Often, during the goal setting phase, people want to move straight into the next main stage: Getting Things Done. Sponsors and employers, in particular, tend to be very anxious to see some tangible evidence that their funding is being spend to good effect so that minutes of meetings and things agreed will not usually be taken as evidence of achievement. Such impatience and anxiety is understandable, but the Getting Things Done phase does depend on a clear definition of aims.

The definition of aims may well depend upon posessing relevant information. In fact, an information gathering or reconnaissance stage, as Everard and Morris call it, may have been necessary before defining goals. Trump (1967), in discussing steps towards innovation, proposes five steps, of which the first two are concerned with information gathering:

1. Analysing co-operatively reasons for present practices
2. Discovering what people want that is different from what they are doing.

Such information gathering is also an important part of illuminative evaluation.

Information can be classified under two headings: What We Already Know and What We Need to Know. To establish both will involve assembling relevant facts, ideas, skills, experience and resources. This will involve drawing upon existing knowledge and expertise and records. Some of the information will exist in people's heads, and will have to be elicited by discussion, interview, and questionnaire. Other information will exist in records, such as existing syllabuses, teaching materials, examination results and test scores, comments from students and other interested parties, ministry reports and proposals, articles in the press, and so on. A most important source of information will be that which is concerned with skills and expertise within the group: who is good at what? The existing expertise of members of the institution is an important resource and, to ensure their involvement and commitment, should be drawn upon.

Information which is needed will, of course, be crucial. Decisions will have to be made about the precise nature of the information required and means of obtaining it. It may be necessary to learn about the students' previous language learning experience; or it may be important to discover the precise needs of the learners; or it may be necessary to check costings and sources of funds in order to establish a budget.

Some thought will have to be given at this stage to what will be done with the information once it has been assembled. How will it be processed and interpreted? What options willprobably be revealed? What risks will be discovered? How are people to react to the information? How will it influence planned outcomes? The discussions involved in answering such questions are also part of the process of reaching an understanding which

is the basis of illuminative evaluation.

4.Defining What Has to Be Done

Once decisions have been made about information known and needed, attention should shift to the What Has To Be Done and Planning phases, which are not simply a restatement of aims, but involve detailed listing of action, deadlines and responsibilities. Everard and Morris (op cit.: 204-205) summarize the characteristics of an effective plan as follows:

1. It is purposeful — the activities are clearly linked to the change goals and priorities.

2. It is task-specific — the types of activities involved are clearly identified rather than broadly generalized, and responsibility for carrying them out is unambiguously assigned.

3. It is temporal — target dates are specified and achievement is monitored.

4. It is integrated — the discrete activities are linked to show interdependencies and sequencing networks.

5. It is adaptable — there are contingency plans and ways of adapting to unexpected problems, such as

time slippage and unforeseen resistance.

6. It is cost-effective -- in terms of the investment both of time and people.

In Trump's terms, we have now moved on to steps 3 to 5 in his sequence,viz.

3. Make tentative decisions about the priority of proposed changes

4. Plan the innovation carefully in terms of teacher preparation, student preparation, procedures to be followed and the anticipated effects of the innovation

5. Determine the times and techniques for evaluation.

5.Action

Once plans have been fixed, we proceed to the Action stage. In fact, some actions may already have been carried out. It may be that what might be called an 'obvious' action should be performed early on during the reconnaissance phase. For instance, if an innovation is being mooted which will involve considerable expenditure, a financial feasability study would sensibly be carried out as a preliminary exercise, and this would involve some action in terms of obtaining relevant information, such as the size of the ministry grant for the forthcoming year or estimates based on

figures for the past year. In general, though, the action stage comes after the goal-setting and planning stages.

During the action stage monitoring of what is being done should be maintained. Indeed, it is important to schedule periodic review meetings so that everyone can report achievements to date, problems encountered and proposals for further action. This is what Roger Bowers calls "keeping an eye on things". Although the co-ordinator will have an important role here, all members of the group should accept responsibility for keeping an eye on things and for calling attention to problems.

6.Reviewing and Evaluating

Finally, we come to the review and evaluation stage. Reviewing, as just noted, is part of the continuing monitoring process which ensures that things are on target. Evaluation can be thought of in two stages: on-going or formative ,i.e. a process of feed-back; and final or summative, whereby outcomes are evaluated against the success criteria specified during the goal-setting stage. In both cases, successes and difficulties can be analysed to provide the basis for improvement.

Another function of evaluation is illuminative. Parlett and Hamilton (1977:12) point out that

> The introduction of an innovation sets off a chain of repercussions throughout the learning milieu. In turn these unintended consequences are likely to affect the innovation itself, changing its form and

> moderating its impact....Connecting changes in he learning milieu with the intellectual experiences of students is one of the chief concerns for illuminative evaluation.

Such illuminative evaluation involves observation and inquiry and it attempts to explain what is observed. The task, as Parlett and Hamilton see it, is

> to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex reality (or realities) surrounding the programme: in short, to 'illuminate'.

Illuminative evaluation is especially significant in the light of Miller's warning that

> too often an innovation is introduced as 'the answer' rather than as something good but not perfect that can be improved with experience and careful study. (Miller 1967:17)

Mangement's Responsibilities

Management, as part of an organization, has a responsibility to make provision for the processes which I have just outlined. In other words, managment must provide the conditions which stave off ossification and ensure that a good school, like a successful company, is a learning organization. (Everard & Morris, op cit. 173) Furthermore, only management

has (or should have) a whole view of things, and management must be in touch with the processes of innovation throughout. It is also up to management to provide an essential element: leadership. Although it appears that democratically organized groups tend to work better than ones in which there is a top-down authority structure, leadership is an important ingredient in a successful organization, and there is a distinction to be made between the roles of an effective manager and that of leader.

> The effective manager is essentially someone who motivates other people and administers resources to ensure that the company's objectives are fulfilled. The effective leader motivates people to create and follow new objectives. (Zaleznik, cited by Goldsmith and Clutterbuck, op cit., 27)

Clearly, motivating other people is crucial. But equally important is that effective managers, either themselves or by delegation, make provision for someone to assume a co-ordinating role within a group, particularly one which involves more than half a dozen people. Indeed, it may be difficult for even smaller groups to operate successfully over a prolonged period unless someone takes responsibility for chairing, co-ordinating, monitoring and record keeping. The function of the co-ordinator will not be to impose his or her own ideas on the group; rather, it is his/her role to elicit, clarify, encourage, summarize and to keep the group on target. In this, s/he should be assisted by the group and by other members who may assume special roles, such as record keeper, information gatherer, researcher, and so on.

Management also has certain other obligations, among which Gross et al. (1971) list

1. Taking the steps necessary to provide members of the organization with a clear picture of their new role requirements and in ensuring a clear understanding of the innovation.

2. Adjusting organizational arrangements to make them compatible with the innovation.

3. Providing members of the organization with retraining experiences so that they have the capabilities needed to carry out the innovation.

4. Providing the necessary resources to carry out the innovation.

5. Providing the appropriate supports and rewards needed to maintain the participants' willingness to make implementation efforts.

Conclusion

Both management as process and management as part of an organization play an important part in running a successful educational enterprise and in

bringing about the successful development and installation of innovation. The content of a course, the methods employed and the materials used are pedagogic and professional concerns; but choosing, using and evaluating all of these involve management and the application of reasonably systematic ways of organizing and running a complex network of social, personal and professional relationships. In these respects, the activities of commercial and educational management coincide. All of us working in ELT can benefit from the experience and theories derived from the commercial sphere with whom we may be surprised to find that we have more in common than we thought. We can also profitably draw upon the collective wisdom available in Education, particularly from the fields of curriculum development and the mangement of educational innovation. If we do adapt ideas and practices from these different fields, we may avoid the disaster referred to by Goldsmith and Clutterbuck at the beginning of this paper, and instead arrive at recipes for success. The beneficiaries of such success will be the very people teachers are usually most concerned with: their students.

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